

*This is a longer version of the review that appeared in Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 47 (1997)*

*Frege* by Anthony Kenny (Penguin, 1995. Pp. xi + 223)

*Frege's Theory of Sense and Reference* by Wolfgang Carl (Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. viii + 220)

Two very different books on Frege: so different that one could be forgiven for thinking that they are about quite different philosophers who happen to share a name.

Kenny's book is designed as an introduction to Frege, and as such it succeeds: it is generally clear, accurate and accessible. Kenny tells us that he was commissioned to write it in 1973; but that he waited until the appearance of Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Mathematics*. Despite the wait, the book reads as though it might have been written in the seventies. The only secondary sources mentioned are by Dummett, Geach and the Neales; one finds no trace of more recent scholarship on Frege. Instead Kenny takes us on an expedition through some of Frege's major published works, providing in each case a thorough discussion that remains very close to the text. The result is a useful book that will be helpful to those reading Frege for the first time, especially when tackling the logical works. Kenny describes it as targeted at the general reader, but I suspect that the very compressed accounts of propositional and predicate calculus will be hard going for those who have done no logic. A better audience might be those who are doing an introductory logic course, and want to put what they have learned into some historical and philosophical context.

The most novel section for those already familiar with Frege will be the discussion of his contention that the concept *horse* is not a concept. Kenny seems to want to defend Frege's contention by likening it to the true claim that ' "swims" ' is not a verb (true since it is the name of a verb, and hence a noun). The idea is that the expression 'the concept ...' serves like quotation marks; and since this result is also achieved by the use of italics, the expression 'the concept *horse*' serves to mention something that has already been mentioned, and so denotes a noun. It strikes me that this does not provide much of a *defence* of Frege's position: why not think that the expression 'the concept ...' and the use of italics are syncategorematic devices that function together like quotation marks? However, as an *interpretation* it gains some plausibility from the fact that, as Kenny notes, Frege makes a similar claim in a footnote to the passages in question (*Collected Papers* p. 186 n. 8). Kenny certainly provides a interestingly deflationary reading of these passages, in contrast to those commentators who have read them as highly significant.

I say that this *seems* to be the way that Kenny aims to defend Frege's claims about the concept *horse*; certainly it is the best I can make of his argument. But if so, Kenny's exposition here is uncharacteristically poor. Partly this is the result of an apparent failure to italicize a crucial occurrence of 'horse' (middle of p. 125); more importantly, it stems from Kenny's unnecessary and distracting discussion of sentences that contain *both* iterated quotation marks, *and* the expression 'the verb ..' (Kenny's example (20));

*pace* Kenny's claim, his interpretation doesn't require him to liken Frege's discussion of the concept *horse* to such sentences, which involve three, not two, levels of mention.

I have a few other minor worries. The account of universal quantification in terms of substitution instances (p. 21) will only work if each object has a name. The mixing of Fregean and modern notation in the discussion of the *Grundgesetze* is confusing. Especially misleading is the use of the horizontal in the otherwise modern statement of Axiom IV (p. 171). (Something has also gone wrong with the gloss on Axiom IV: even *very* approximately it isn't 'If not  $p$ , then  $\bar{p}$ '). More substantially, the idea that Frege's later work should be seen as preparation for Wittgenstein will doubtless jar on some readers. Was his main contribution to epistemology really to concentrate Cartesian errors into "a single virulent boil" for Wittgenstein to lance? Here in particular Kenny's neglect of recent scholarship shows.

Wolfgang Carl's book, in contrast, is not meant as a mere introduction. Instead it is advertised as "a major reassessment of a seminal figure". This is to be achieved by an analysis of Frege's doctrine of sense and reference, which is held to be the keystone of his philosophy (p. 3). Carl complains that other interpretations of Frege have been partial. His aim is to correct this by focusing on the doctrine of sense and reference within the context of Frege's unpublished "Logic". If partiality is a vice, we might wonder whether it isn't Carl's approach that is partial. There is hardly any mention here of Frege the mathematician or logician; indeed, amazingly in a book on sense and reference, Carl decides to ignore altogether the application of the doctrine to the semantics of opaque contexts (p. 4). But putting this worry to one side, what does his reassessment of Frege amount to?

It soon becomes clear what Carl is against. He is against treating Frege as a modern analytic philosopher of language; he is against treating the name/bearer relation as the paradigm of the *Bedeutung* relation; he is against treating the doctrine of the third realm as an ontological doctrine. He is not unique in this; these complaints have become familiar in much recent work on Frege (Sluga and Weiner spring immediately to mind). More original, but less clear, is Carl's positive interpretation of Frege. At its heart is the idea that the theory of sense and reference is fundamentally an epistemic theory. The central claim appears to be this: to grasp the sense of a sentence is to understand what would count as knowledge of its reference (p. 156). Since for Frege the reference of a sentence is a truth value, such knowledge is knowledge of a truth value. Given that references are truth values it might look as though one could know the reference of a sentence without knowing that it was the reference of that sentence (as one might know a person without knowing that they were the reference of a certain name). But Carl insists that this is not so: the mistake is to think of knowledge of truth values as like knowledge of objects in the ordinary sense. (p. 157) "There is no way of knowing the reference of a sentence except by knowing that it is the truth value of a particular thought expressed by it." (ibid.). If this is right it is unclear what to make of Frege's insistence that all true sentences refer to the same object.

Clearly Carl's interpretation of Frege's notion of sense is defensible; it simply needs more said in its defence. But when we come to his account of Frege's notion of judgement this is not the case. Carl attributes to Frege "the epistemic notion of judgement" by which he means the doctrine that:

‘[T]o make a judgement is not just to make a claim to knowledge; such a judgement is really knowledge that a particular thought is true.’ (p. 144)

This is a remarkable attribution. If to make a judgement is to *know* that a thought is true, then there can be no false judgements. Carl is keen to view Frege against the background of his Kantian heritage (p. 188); and there has been some debate about whether Kant’s views commit him to the highly implausible doctrine that there can be no false judgements. Carl here attributes this doctrine to Frege. Moreover, he sees it not simply as an unwelcome consequence of Frege’s other views, but rather as a doctrine that Frege was happy to embrace outright. What grounds does he have for doing so? Carl concedes that “Frege never explicitly argued for what I have called ‘the epistemic notion of judgment’”. Instead he gives two pieces of evidence for the attribution. Firstly he claims that in the “Logic” Frege defines judging as acknowledging something to be true (p. 57). But when we look to what Frege says there, we find only the claim that “inwardly to recognize something as true is to make a judgement” (*Posthumous Writings* pp. 2, 7). This isn’t obviously a *definition* of judging; what Frege says is quite compatible with thinking that we also make a judgement when we falsely believe something to be true. The second piece of evidence that Carl cites (p. 144) is a passage from “The Thought”:

Consequently we distinguish:

- (1) the grasp of a thought—thinking,
- (2) the acknowledgement of the truth of the thought—the act of judgement,
- (3) the manifestation of this judgement—assertion.

We have already performed the first act when we form a propositional question. An advance in science takes place in this way: first a thought is grasped, and thus may perhaps be expressed in a propositional question; after appropriate investigations, this thought is finally recognized to be true.

(*Collected Papers* pp. 355–6)

Now I suppose it is possible to think that Frege is here equating *all* judgement with the recognition of the truth of a thought (rather than claiming that this is what happens with successful judgements, the sort that give rise to advances in science). However, such an interpretation is shown to be wildly mistaken by passages like this one from Frege’s “Logic”:

It is not the holding something to be true that concerns us but the laws of truth. We can also think of these as prescriptions for making judgements; we must comply with them in our judgements if we are not to fail of the truth ... Thinking, as it actually takes place, is not always in agreement with the laws of logic, any more than men’s actual behaviour is in agreement with the moral law.

(*Posthumous Writings* p. 145)

Clearly Frege is claiming here that we do not always judge in accordance with the laws of truth; hence some of our judgments do not amount to knowledge.

Carl’s understanding of Frege’s notion of judgement thus strikes me as obviously wrong. This has repercussions for much of what he says. For instance, the “epistemic notion of judgement” seems to play a crucial role in his argument against Evans and McDowell. They claim that, on a proper understanding of the matter, there can be no

sense without reference. Carl responds that “McDowell either misses the point, or makes a claim for which he does not argue: that one cannot grasp a thought without believing it”, and that “Evans, like McDowell, makes the mistake of identifying thoughts with beliefs” (p. 180). Now there is absolutely no reason to think that Evans and McDowell made such an elementary mistake. But suppose they did: how would that affect their argument against the possibility of sense without reference? Carl claims that “the issue of proper names’ having a sense but no reference has something to do with entertaining thoughts without believing them or making a judgement” (*ibid.*) This is vague; but the idea seems to be that bearerless names will only occur in the expression of thoughts which are entertained without being without being judged to be true; and that in this case the issue of their needing a reference simply does not arise. The obvious response to this is that once we accept that we can entertain thoughts about non-existent things (something that Evans and McDowell reject), we should accept that we sometimes make judgements about them—in cases where we mistakenly take them to exist. It is only the “epistemic notion of judgement” that blocks this response: if every judgement is a piece of knowledge, then there can be no such ontologically mistaken judgements. Once that account of judgement is rejected, as surely it must be, the case against Evans and McDowell, such as it was, collapses.

A similar issue arises in something that Carl says in response to Dummett. Carl writes:

What kind of cognitive value can a sentence containing a proper name without a bearer be supposed to have? Dummett does not raise the question because he ignores Frege’s epistemic notion of judgement. We might ask whether King Arthur defeated the Saxons, but after being informed that there was no man called “King Arthur” we would not raise the question any more of whether asserting that sentence or its negation counts as a claim to know something ... there would be no point in raising the question at all. (p. 152)

On the contrary, there remains every reason for raising the question. We want to know whether someone who does believe in the existence of King Arthur can form the judgement that Arthur defeated the Saxons. The intuitive answer, which Frege endorses, is that they can. Even for someone who accepts the “epistemic notion of judgement”, the question will still be raised; it is just the answer that will change.

Now it is true that in discussing bearerless names Frege concentrates almost exclusively on cases in which they are known by all parties to be fictitious. In such cases judgments would indeed not be formed; there would only be what Frege termed “mock judgements”. This might encourage the belief that bearerless names only occur in such cases. But this limited focus is something that Evans himself complains about (*Varieties of Reference* p. 28), so Carl is hardly entitled to restrict his focus without justification. At one point Carl recognizes this. He accepts that it is possible to believe that something exists when it does not; and he concludes that “the issue is not whether a given name has a reference but, rather, whether we believe or know that it has a reference” (p. 183). However, he fails to follow up on the consequences that this has for his discussion of Evans and McDowell and of Dummett, or more broadly for the “epistemic notion of judgement”.

I have concentrated so far on Carl’s unsatisfactory discussion of the notion of judgement. We might hope that this presents an isolated problem. Unfortunately it

does not. Arguments are frequently hazy and inconclusive; sometimes they are patently invalid. Time and again Carl gives the impression of having simply failed to understand the philosophers with whom he takes issue. Some examples:

(i) Carl objects to Dummett's discussion of the doctrine that if part of an expression lacks a referent, the whole will lack a referent (p. 124). He cites Dummett's claim that the doctrine "derives its force ... from the case of complex names. If there was no such man as King Arthur, there was no such man as King Arthur's father; if there is no such planet as Vulcan, there is no such point as Vulcan's centre of mass". To this Carl responds: "It has to be pointed out that the causal dependence of the existence of one person on the existence of another (King Arthur on his father) cannot be simply transferred to the relation between the reference of different expressions." But obviously Dummett is not concerned with *causal* dependence. This is not only made abundantly clear by the use of the Vulcan example; even in formulating the King Arthur example, Dummett has carefully chosen to speak of the dependence of Arthur's father on Arthur, presumably thinking that this would preclude such misinterpretation.

(ii) Kripke is criticized for assuming that Frege's theory of sense was concerned with linguistic meaning. Carl rejects the idea that names are synonymous with descriptions expressing their sense. But he then goes on to accept the idea that descriptions will sometimes (but not always) fix their reference. After quoting Kripke's comments that someone who has fixed the length *one metre* using the metre rule will know *a priori* that the rule is one meter long, he says:

In the same way, two people understanding the sentence "Dr. Gustav Lauben was wounded" in the way outlined by Frege could know "automatically, without further investigation" that Dr. Gustav Lauben is the only doctor living in a house known to both of them. Although this is a piece of information that can be gained only by empirical knowledge, it constitutes the sense of the proper name "Dr. Gustav Lauben" and is taken for granted by both of them in whatever they may say about its bearer. (p. 176)

What does Carl mean when he says that this knowledge is "taken for granted"? If it is possessed "in the same way" as the knowledge that the metre rule is a metre long, then it is known *a priori*. But if it can only be known empirically as Carl says, in what sense is it known *a priori*? Moreover, if Carl is going to accept a reference fixing account of senses, what reply does he have to the criticisms of that doctrine that are made in *Naming and Necessity*?

(iii) Church is criticized for equating sense with linguistic meaning on the following grounds: "It is important to realize that the sense of a sentence identified by Frege with a thought cannot be taken as its linguistic meaning, because otherwise one could not explain why he attributed a special kind of sense to declarative sentences. It is obvious that they do not differ in the relevant way, for example, from imperatives with regard to their having 'linguistic meaning'." (p. 93) Many people have contended that senses can't be treated as linguistic meanings; but as it stands, this argument is a non-starter. If Frege had claimed that only declarative sentences have senses, then the point would be well taken: for imperatives clearly have linguistic meaning, so if they lack sense then sense cannot be meaning. However, this was not Frege's claim. He simply divided off a subset of the senses—the thoughts—for special treatment. By itself then Carl's argument shows nothing. It is as though someone tried to argue that

human beings cannot be members of the species *homo sapiens*, since we distinguish men from women, yet both are clearly members of the same species.

I won't go on. After reading this book one turns back to Frege with relief.

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